World Chronicle

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"UN REFORM: WHERE DOES IT GO FROM HERE?"

The UN's Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has famously stated that reform of the world body is a "process, not an event." In this edition of World Chronicle, the impact and direction of the UN's reform process are examined. What are the UN's main tasks, and how will reform help the organization focus on them? How is reform changing bureaucratic practices, and helping the organization cope with complex peacekeeping tasks? Are member states getting better value for their money now than some years ago? These questions are explored with the help of Ms. Louise Fréchette, the UN Deputy Secretary-General.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is **World** Chronicle.

United Nations reform is a process, not an event, says Secretary-General Kofi Annan. How far has that process gone? What is its focus and where is it leading the international organization in the new millennium? With us to report on UN reform is Louise Fréchette, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations whose work includes implementing the reform of the world organization.

Joining me to talk to Ms. Fréchette are Thalif Deen of *Interpress Service* and Edith Lederer of the *Associated Press*. Ms. Fréchette, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

Madam Deputy Secretary-General, how far has reform gone? I read or heard somewhere that perhaps it has gone about as far as it can go on the authority of the Secretary-General and yourself and that from here on in its the delegates, member governments, who will have to pick up the ball and run with it. Is that right?

FRECHETTE: Well, I think there are big chunks of reform that belong to the member states -- Security Council reform can only be affected by the member states themselves -- but I think any organization can always be improved upon. And therefore there is both a sense of satisfaction at the improvements that have been brought to our capacity to operate, in the peacekeeping field for instance, but also a sense that we can go further in making this organization more efficient, more effective, better able to serve the member states, and making the inter-governmental organs of the Assembly -- the General Assembly, the ECOSOC – perhaps more and more productive.

LITTLEJOHNS: Economic and Social Council. What about the reaction of the people involved, members of the secretariat, staff, are they perhaps worried about some of these reforms?

FRECHETTE: Well, in '97 when the Secretary-General started his first mandate reform was driven in part by continued cuts in the budget and by a number of conditions imposed by member states, particularly in Washington. And these reforms had serious implications in terms of the number of posts that were allowed in the UN and so on. The Secretary-General just issued a new report, a new series of proposals on reform that are not driven by this. They are not driven by threats of further cuts in the budget or by some conditions imposed elsewhere, they are driven by a desire to ensure that we do the best we can for the member states with the resources that we have. And we have emphasized in

particular the need to ensure that our activities, what the people in the Secretariat do, that what they do correspond to the new priorities that the member states have set out in the Millennium Declaration and through the Monterrey Conference to the Johannesburg Conference. So we are looking really not so much at a reduction in the resources, although we are always looking for ways to save, to be more cost effective, but to the application of the resources that we have for the real priorities, to what really matters in the year 2002 and beyond.

DEEN: In this new report the Secretary-General says that a large chunk of the budget goes on conference services and he specifically mentioned that in 2000 and 2001 there were some 15, 484 meetings and 5,879 reports. But how are you going to cut this down because there is a very strong resistance by member states?

FRECHETTE: Well, clearly the Secretary-General cannot decree that he will limit the number of meetings. These meetings are held at the request of and by virtue of decisions by the member states. On the other hand, I think there is quite a bit of leeway for the Secretary-General to streamline the reporting a bit. What he has said is that he believes that we should sort of merge a number of traditional reports, reduce the number, make sure that we present a smaller number of reports, better organized reports that are – right now we produce far too many reports that treat the same issues in a very fragmented way and that's something that he can do. And there has been very good reception on the part of the member states to this so I think – I expect that in the coming weeks when the General Assembly picks up the proposals made by the Secretary-General, we will find very strong encouragement for the Secretary-General to move in that direction.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do all these reports come out in all the official languages of the UN?

FRECHETTE: Not all of them.

LITTLEJOHNS: Including Chinese, which is spoken which is spoken by only one member state?

FRECHETTE: Not all the reports come out, and it depends very much on what their purpose is. But the vast majority of reports are official documents that are submitted to the General Assembly, to the Economic and Social Council, various thematic commissions, and they have to come out in all languages. So it is a considerable expenditure for the Organization and it is also a very, very complex production load for the Secretariat. And we think we can do better. We think we can reduce the number and become more efficient at serving the Assembly.

LEDERER: You used the word streamlining. The corner stone of the new reform programme is streamlining and in the package the Secretary-General appeals to member states to discontinue programmes that are no longer necessary. Why do you expect more cooperation now than you've received in the past on this particular goal?

FRECHETTE: Well, I think first of all the Millennium Summit led to the adoption of the master policy document of the UN. We've rarely had that kind of very, very clear policy direction from the very top that has spelt out in very clear and concrete terms what the priorities are. And there is very, very strong support throughout the United Nations, and the member states, for focusing on what has emerged from the Millennium Summit. That then becomes the basis for looking at everything we do and say, "Hmm, some activities may have been very relevant ten years ago but are they as relevant now that we have these new priorities?" And that's the judgment that has to be passed. And the member states have said that they expect – that they are willing to review the programme of work of the Organization to make sure that we concentrate our efforts on things that really matter. And this will be expressed through the budget that the Secretary-General will submit next year, which will show some adjustment in where we spend the money and on which issues.

LEDERER: Do you have some examples of programmes that are redundant or unnecessary as we head in to the 21st century?

FRECHETTE: Well, I think it is easier to start from where the emphasis should be. And it's clear that globalization and its impact on developing countries should be a guiding theme of what we do and that we should give priority to those studies and analyses and policy recommendations that address that problem. I think we now have a very clear set of millennium development goals. They are very clear, the issues are very clear. I think this is what should guide our choice and I think by a process of concentrating on those things that have been clearly identified in the Millennium Declaration, automatically things that may still be used for our interest may fall by the wayside. I think we have to look at our publications and we think we have to look at the reports that we issue and make sure that they all fit within this framework of priorities that the member states have given us.

LITTLEJOHNS: Much of the impetus for reform came from the United States in a time when the United States was quite critical of the organization. The General Accounting Office I think has been looking at what has happened so far. Would you say that the Bush administration is reasonably satisfied with what you have been doing?

FRECHETTE: Well, I think there are two pieces of evidence I can quote in this respect. One is that a recent report of the General Office Inspectorate of the United States, I

think about 18 months ago, issued a very favourable report looking at the impact of the reforms that the Secretary-General introduced in 1997 to conclude that we were really heading in the right direction; that there had been tremendous improvement in terms of our capacity to work in a coordinated fashion rather than in the very desperate and uncoordinated fashion of the past. I think our performance in peacekeeping missions has improved very significantly. To think that we have been given within the course of six months responsibility to run, actually be the government in two territories – East Timor and Kosovo – and that we have done that quite well I think is a demonstration that we have learned from the experiences of the early 1990's when we started experimenting with these complex missions. And that has registered also in Washington. And I think the fact that a third tranche of the repayment of arrears was authorized just two days ago, without new conditions attached, I think is a signal that there is acknowledgment in Washington, as there is elsewhere, that this Organization while not being perfect – and nobody claims it is – has really changed significantly in the last several years and is performing better and more efficiently than in the past.

DEEN: Speaking of the United States, Washington keeps using this cliché describing the UN as a bloated bureaucracy, are there any plans to cut down on the number of staff if this is true?

FRECHETTE: Well, actually one of the things that reassures me is that we haven't seen the bloated bureaucracy description used as often as it used to be. The fact is the budget of the UN has been frozen in nominal terms for seven years now and yet the number of mandates that we have had to deliver has increased steadily: the number of meetings that we've had to serve, the number of reports that we've had to produce, the number of conferences and, of course, the number of new missions and so on. And we've managed to do that without any increase in the budget. Why? Because I think we have become better and more cost effective. And therefore I think the battle around the number of posts or the overall size of the budget seems to me to be less of a preoccupation at the moment. And in his new report on reform the Secretary-General says that, in his opinion, we have gone long enough with this zero growth policy and that he believes that the next budget that we will be submitting next year should include a modest increase in the overall level of resources. My sense is that there is some receptivity for some modest movement upwards in our overall budget.

LITTLEJOHNS: The budget is what, about 1.2 billion a year?

FRECHETTE: A little more than that, yes. About 1.2, 1.3.

LEDERER: Talking about the first five years of the Secretary-General's reform programme, do you feel that it accomplished his goals and has the United Nations now reached the size, funding levels, and the organizational shape that he wants?

FRECHETTE: I think in terms of the organizational shape, to the extent that the shape could be modified without changes to the Charter, I think yes. The reforms that he introduced, changes in the structure of the Secretariat, I think have worked quite well. He wanted the Organization to work much more as a team than before and he instituted a system of weekly cabinet meetings involving the heads of all the departments, funding programmes. That has worked very well. He wanted the UN at the field level to also work as a team, in developing countries in particular, and by all accounts this has made a big difference. He wanted us to be more open to civil society and the business sector and I think there has been a lot of innovation in the last five years, especially if we look at the extraordinary involvement of civil society in the major conferences. If you look at the Global Compact initiative, if you look at the partnership stemming from the Turner donation, if you look at the very productive partnership with other foundations like the Gates Foundations and so on, there has been a lot of innovation. The Brahimi Report I think was another major step in ...

LITTLEJOHNS: On peacekeeping.

FRECHETTE: On peacekeeping. That was a major effort to strengthen our capacity to deliver on peacekeeping. The member states responded very well, have increased quite significantly the resources available to our Peacekeeping Department to do a better job in running these peace missions. So for five years I think the sub-total of the change and improvements is, to our thinking, significant and a source of some satisfaction, even though none of us would claim that we are perfect.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. Madame Fréchette, you mentioned civil society and the contributions of the foundation of the media tycoon, as he is sometimes called, Ted Turner, and Bill Gates of Microsoft. How is civil society, apart from these billionaires, being brought into cohesion with the UN?

FRECHETTE: Well, civil society is a participant and a partner at every level. It is a partner certainly at the country level. They are partners in the delivery of services, especially in the humanitarian side – every time there is a humanitarian crisis UNICEF and the World Food Programme work hand in hand with civil society institutions – but they are also all partners in defining the policies and the strategies that are adopted in the UN. All major conferences have involved the very active participation of NGOs that have often

brought in considerable expertise and a lot of good ideas to the table, which have been considered by governments and incorporated in their own policy platform. And I think NGOs have also been very important partners in the advocacy function of the UN, in advocating, you know, increasing official development assistance for instance towards the fight against poverty. I think they are very important advocates on issues like AIDS.

LITTLEJOHNS: AIDS.

FRECHETTE: Exactly. So the presence of civil society in the UN has only gone one way and that has been up to such an extent that some issues, new issues such as the use of information technology for development, the Economic and Social Council decided that the most practical way of actively tackling this issue was to right from the start create some kind of partnership with the private sector and NGOs and governments to advance. And that is **the** main vehicle now for advancing this whole issue. So this being said, the number of NGOs has grown enormously. You now have thousands upon thousands of NGOs who want to be able to participate in the work of the UN. It is becoming very difficult because there is not even enough room physically to accommodate everybody. That is why in his last report the Secretary-General has announced that he will create a panel of eminent persons to review the experience of interaction between the UN and civil societies, and NGOs in particular, to see if there are improvements or alternative ways of involving the civil society partners.

DEEN: You spoke of a 1.2 billion-dollar annual budget but human rights activists have been complaining that only about 40 million is allocated for human rights every year, which they think is very, very small compared to the... Is this because there is resistance from developing countries?

FRECHETTE: Well, I think each country brings its own set of priorities when the time comes to discuss budget allocations. I know that many groups and many countries consider that there should be more resources in the areas of human rights coming from the regular budget of the UN. But there are competing demands and many countries consider that they have higher priorities in other fields. So this being said, there is also a very, very important amount of money that is added to what is voted in the regular budget through voluntary contributions from a large number of governments so that the actual amount of money that is available to the High Commissioner for Human Rights to carry out the programme on human rights exceeds very significantly the amount that is voted through the regular budget every year. But to our way of thinking it is not an entirely satisfactory situation

because voluntary funding is less reliable. It fluctuates more and it tends to be – it doesn't give the long-term stability that one is looking for.

DEEN: So the General Assembly is the final arbiter as to how much human rights should...

FRECHETTE: Oh, absolutely.

LEDERER: One of the proposals in the reform documents seems to come up again and again, and that is this idea of sending documents to be translated in other countries, for instance to French-speaking Africa, which would save both time and money, not to mention stimulating employment among bilingual speakers in those countries. Why hasn't this been enacted yet? What seems to be the problem?

FRECHETTE: Well, I think in order to do that effectively, and within the time frames that we have to meet, one has to have a very solid information technology infrastructure. I think we are moving gradually towards a much more intensive use of information technology – distance interpretation for instance – but that is a reasonably new phenomenon. The technology has not been available for that long time. Some parts of the world are not as connected as others and therefore it isn't necessarily easy to work in that fashion with every part of the world. And we also have to have the money to invest in strengthening our information technology base in order to sustain a more technologically based process. And we make the point in the report that we hope the member states will be ready to invest more than they have in information technology. They also have to invest a little more in the training of our people. We spend very little on training people here compared to similar organizations. And, as you all know, we spend so little on the maintenance of this building that we now have...

LITTLEJOHNS: That it is falling apart.

FRECHETTE: That it is falling apart. So there is investment to be made in the UN to make sure that in the long-term we are as productive and as cost effective as our member states want us to be.

LITTLEJOHNS: When does reform end?

FRECHETTE: I don't think reform ever ends because I can't think of any institution and – it's not only a matter for the UN – of any institution that can declare that it has now achieved perfection. The world changes every day, continues to change; the requirements change, the technology changes, and we have to change with the time. But what I think is perhaps a little different with this new package of reform is we feel that we are not starting from scratch, that in fact we are building on very significant change that we can

demonstrate and therefore we are just showing member states, showing public opinion, that our Secretary-General is committed personally – not because he is forced – to continuing to improve this Organization, which I think is a vital institution for the countries and the people of the world. If we believe in multilateralism, then we need to have a solid institution that is well run, that is efficient, that can respond quickly, effectively to the demands that are placed upon it.

DEEN: When the Secretary-General finishes his term of office would you offer your candidacy as the UN's first woman Secretary-General? [Laughter]

FRECHETTE: Absolutely not, absolutely not.

LITTLEJOHNS: Why not? Being a Deputy in some situations often implies a national succession.

FRECHETTE: Sometime it does and sometimes it doesn't.

LEDERER: And to have a word on this, I somehow think that the Asians are chomping at the bit too to name the next Secretary-General.

FRECHETTE: That's certainly not in my domain at all.

LITTLEJOHNS: A former British Ambassador once made the remark that it was gender over geography.

DEEN: Right.

FRECHETTE: What an interesting concept.

DEEN: They are looking for the first woman Secretary-General.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, exactly. Exactly.

LEDERER: Actually, I was going to go back to conferences and ask you a gender related question. I know that there is this big question about a proliferation of major world conferences but I know that some women's groups have really been pressuring to try and get a major follow up to the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference to bring in a new generation of women to support this whole cause of gender equality. And I wonder whether this is the kind of appeal that would have resonance in this reform?

LITTLEJOHNS: You have about 20 seconds to answer that.

FRECHETTE: Well, I think we've said as a general proposition that we should not abuse the formula of major conferences and we have had quite a number and they should be called only when there is a need for very high-level policy guidance to be given. It doesn't mean that there should never be other big conferences but they should be used sparingly, and perhaps we can find other formulas to make sure that there is vigorous follow up to very good agreements that were reached in Beijing and elsewhere.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ms. Fréchette, that is all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**.

Our guest has been Louis Fréchette, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. She was interviewed by Thalif Deen of *InterPress Service* and Edith Lederer of the *Associated Press*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

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